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The Message from Bethlehem

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By
William Jennings Bryan

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The paperweights which Secretary Bryan has had made and presented to each of the thirty diplomats who signed with him treaties for investigation in all cases, are made of steel and nickel-plated. The steel is composed of melted swords; this explains the inscription on the plowshares—"They shall beat their swords into plowshares."

The Message from Bethlehem

By
WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

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The Message from Bethlehem

IS the peace movement growing? Yes, "On earth peace, and good will towards men"—the message delivered at Bethlehem—is audible to an increasing multitude at each returning Christmastide. To doubt it would be to bring an indictment against Christianity.

Edwin Markham has, in his own inimitable way, given poetic expression to a growing desire:

What was the first prophetic word that rang
When down the starry sky the angels sang,
That night they came as envoys of the Birth—
What word but peace, "peace and good will
on earth"?

And what was the last word the Master said
That parting night when they broke brother-
bread,
That night He knew men would not let Him
live—
Oh, what but "peace I leave" and "peace I
give"?

And yet behold: near twice a thousand years
And still the battle-wrath, the grief, the tears.
Let mercy speed the hour when swords shall
cease,
And men cry back to God, "There shall be
peace."

Civilization may be defined as the harmonious development of the human race, physically, mentally and morally, and who will declare war to be a civilizing agency? It does not develop the race physically; it does not improve the race intellectually;

it does not advance the race morally. War demands its largest toll of the strong and the virile, thus retarding, instead of accelerating, the progress of the race towards physical perfection. It does not encourage intellectual progress; on the contrary, it turns the mind away from the things which enlarge and expand, and contracts the sphere of its activities. It does not make the heart better; instead of doing so, it stirs the passions and enthrones hatred where love should be supreme. It chills the gentler virtues, converts friends into enemies and leads men to enjoy the shedding of blood.

War is not to be judged by the appearance of soldiers on parade. They

are very attractive as they march through the streets in new uniform, keeping step to inspiring music, but this is not war. Go, rather, to the battle-field where men are trying to take each other's lives; see the upturned faces of the dead and hear the groans of the wounded. Then visit the homes from which the bread-winner has been taken and consider the increased burden thrown upon the widowed mother—the protection and support withdrawn from the fatherless children; compute the awful cost of war, in tears, in treasure and in blood, and answer, as at the judgment seat, whether peaceful means for the settlement of inter-

national disputes are not infinitely to be preferred.

Some have regarded war as the fruitful source of many blessings, but an examination into the facts of history will convince the candid inquirer that the race has been rowing upstream and that it has been compelled to subtract the velocity of the war current from its speed ; it would have moved more rapidly but for the energy it has had to employ to counteract this current.

Man is able to extract some good from almost every evil, but that is no reason why evil should be preferred to good. The question is not whether man is strong enough to re-

sist influences which, like war, tend to drag him down, but rather whether peace has not greater victories.

To face death without flinching is glorious, if the sacrifice is made for a righteous cause; we cannot withhold our admiration from those who yield up the last full measure of their lives in defense of their country, their kind, or truth, and yet we can and should deplore the conditions which compel such sacrifice, and pray for the coming of the day when man's efforts will be wholly devoted to helpful service rather than to the work of destruction.

If war is necessary to man's advancement, it logically follows that

without war man would degenerate. How could one worship God if He had so made us that we must shed blood occasionally in order to keep ourselves keyed up to the proper pitch? If war is beneficial, then it is a mockery to teach "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbour as thyself."

But war is not necessary to stimulate men to great efforts. As much inspiration can be drawn from a noble life as from an heroic death. Every talent that man possesses can find its full employment in lifting the level on which all stand—there is glory in doing good. In a speech which I heard delivered a few months ago at

a peace meeting an idea was advanced which has impressed me more and more as I have revolved it in my mind, namely, that the doubling of the products of the soil by more intelligent methods of cultivation is equivalent to adding to our nation an area equal to that which we now own —and that it would be even more valuable, because the addition would belong to those now here, whereas conquered land would still belong to those who were conquered with it.

The tremendous advance in agricultural methods suggests possibilities in other directions, for there is no limit to the avenues of usefulness which open out before those who are

willing to dedicate themselves to the improvement of conditions. Even the supreme sacrifice for which the battle-field has called in the past may have its parallel in those who give their lives in the investigation of remedies and in the testing of new inventions. Fame will have new camping grounds and patriotic hearts aflame with love will respond to the bugle's thrilling call to intellectual and moral battle-fields.

If war were a thing to be desired, it would be planned for, and resort to it would be systematized—if good, what folly to leave it to chance! A good way to prove the falsity of a bad proposition is to suppose it true and

then follow it until its absurdity is exposed.

Apply this test to war; let those who believe it to be a means of development put their theory to the test. Let them teach it in the schools; let them advise men not merely to be prepared for it in case it should come, but to concert together to bring it at proper intervals, that the world may not be denied its wholesome (?) influence! The fact that war is apologized for instead of praised, that it is deprecated instead of extolled—that we celebrate the anniversaries of treaties, not calls to arms—these are proof positive that war is a weed to be exterminated, not

a fruit-producing plant to be propagated.

The peace sentiment increases; the future belongs to it. For nineteen centuries there has been an expanding hope of the fulfillment of the prophecy spoken by Isaiah, that swords shall be turned into plowshares and spears into pruning-hooks. And at no time has it moved forward more steadily and rapidly than in our day. Every great force in society is contributing to the certainty of its final triumph. Is the percentage of illiteracy decreasing? The mind, freed from the fetters of ignorance, insists upon the substitution of reason for force. It scorns to sink to the

level of a blow when it can use argument more effectually. The more complete information which comes with higher education makes more certain a clear understanding of the forces that lie back of war. Certain interests profit by war, and as soon as this fact becomes generally known the support which these persons give to war is at once converted into an argument against it.

Self-interest, blood-stained and revolting, has too often hidden behind the mask of patriotism. Army contractors have contributed a portion of their profits to manufacture a spurious public opinion. The manufacturers of armour-plate have not

hesitated to capitalize love of country and to fan passion into a consuming flame. They have unblushingly stimulated in the hearts of their countrymen hatred of the foreigner; they have even secretly infused into the breast of the foreigner animosity towards their own countrymen. And the newspaper, so indispensable to popular government, and so powerful for good when rightly employed,—even the newspaper has sometimes sold its birthright for a mess of pottage and weighed the profits derived from sensational head-lines against the satisfaction which comes from a consciousness of service rendered.

The intelligent man considers the

costliness of war. Bankruptcy is the inevitable end when nations enter into a rivalry to see which can be most completely prepared for war that should never come. If might makes right, then the old nations must continue indefinitely the struggle to keep their war footing stronger than that of the new nations, while the new nations, upon this theory, have no chance for supremacy until they have outstripped the old ones in military and naval strength.

War is futile as an arbiter of disputes. How can war decide a moral issue—and what other issue is there that is worth considering? The right, plus an army, may establish a

principle that is sound, but, if sound, it will in time be established without war. No army, however numerous—no navy, however large—can establish a principle that is unsound—these can only postpone a final settlement. "Thought is stronger than artillery parks," says Carlyle in the closing chapters of his History of the French Revolution, "and at last moulds the world like soft clay."

Each nation when at the zenith of its power has proclaimed its own immortality, but the path of history is strewn with the wrecks of boasting, swaggering, bullying empires—whether their hope rested on spear or javelin or sword, it has been shat-

tered. The cannon and the dreadnaught are as powerless as these to stay the onward march of the simplest truth. "You may build your capitols till they reach the sky, but if they rest upon injustice the pulse of a woman will beat them down"—a strong saying but who will question its truth? The forces that are marshalled upon a battle-field are visible forces—they cannot stand before the moral forces. The Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor yet in the fire, but in the still small voice.

The increase in the spirit of brotherhood is one of the clearest manifestations of the present day. "Am I my brother's keeper?" can no longer

be asked to divert suspicion or to rebuke inquiry; it is the soul-stirring question of the hour. The aroused conscience of the world is being turned upon the indirect forms of wrong-doing, and it is being discovered that direct wrong-doing is insignificant in comparison with the wrong-doing by indirect methods. The Commandments "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not kill" are being interpreted in the light of the present day, and it will not much longer be possible to conceal the fact that war is generally an attempt to amend both so as to limit their operation to theft and murder "on a small scale."

The essence of stealing lies in the

appropriating of that which belongs to some one else without giving him an equivalent compensation in return. Killing is the taking of human life without legitimate excuse, and the excuses that are regarded as legitimate are constantly decreasing in number. There is a well-defined and strongly supported movement against legal executions, and Tolstoi has bluntly argued that killing, even in self-defense, costs more lives than it saves. With a growing regard for the sacredness of life it is natural that wholesale slaughter should become more and more repugnant to the conscience of organized society, for war has, as a rule, been resorted to for the

acquiring of territory. As theft and murder frequently are traceable to covetousness, we may expect that the violation of these two Commandments by wholesale, as well as by retail, will decrease in proportion as man comes to realize his kinship to his brother and the indissoluble ties that bind him to his fellow men.

We have yet to deal with the delusion, often sincere, that duty to the world sometimes requires national land grabbing and the subjugation of "inferior people." Analysis will generally show a confusion of thought among those who take this position. The separation of the numerous reasons that are usually mixed together

will show the weakness of each. Those who a few years ago defended imperialism generally employed three arguments which, stripped of unnecessary verbiage, were about as follows:

(1) "We do not want the Philippines and ought not to have taken them, but now that we have taken them there is no way of getting rid of them;" (2) "and then, too, it seems providential;" (3) "and, besides, there is money in it." There is sometimes a mysterious connection between the providential argument and the monetary one; men seldom see the hand of Providence in a proposed national policy unless they be-

lieve there is a dollar in the hand. It is, unfortunately, much easier to convince one that it is his religious duty to do a profitable thing than an unprofitable thing, especially if the thing is done upon a scale large enough to obscure its moral character. There are, however, no moral principles that apply to individuals that do not apply equally to nations.

The quality of morality is not determined by the number engaged in the act—the number only affects the probability of escaping the penalty; and even here it is a fatal mistake to consider only those punishments which are immediate. No moral code can be built upon any theory that

overlooks the effect of wrong-doing upon the character of the wrong-doer. When we advise our children not to steal, we do it primarily for their good and not for the good of those from whom they might otherwise steal. No real or permanent progress is possible in ethics until we understand that it is better for one to suffer wrong than to do wrong; and this applies to nations as well as to individuals.

As the individual cannot look into the future and measure the consequences of a single act, whether that act be good or bad, so a nation is unable to calculate the permanent influence which an act of government may

exert; time and time again nations have suffered on an enormous scale for wrongs done which, at the time, seemed insignificant.

It is not only impossible to weigh commerce in the balance against blood, but it is unjust to the last degree to weigh the commerce which one person secures against the blood which another person sheds to secure it. Even if the profits of war accrued to those who make the sacrifice, the recompense would be inadequate; but who will justify a system where many sow their lives that others may reap a golden harvest?

Few will now attempt to justify wars of conquest and subjugation for

the propagation of religion—it seems hideous when it is presented as a naked proposition without rhetorical adornment. It is not only revolting but it is in conflict with the teachings of our religion. When Christ was urged by His disciples to call down fire upon those who rejected Him, He uttered a rebuke that has been too little heeded by His followers: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Example, not force, is the formula that has been given us for the spread of all that is good. "Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and

glorify your Father which is in heaven."

It is a simple plan and ought to be easily followed, and yet it seems so slow to convert the world by simply doing right. It is so human to want to compel people to do things instead of showing them how. The employment of force also has a tendency to inflame one's self-importance and it seems to require so much less sacrifice. To overcome evil with good is to move in harmony with the divine plan ; it requires a regeneration of the heart to do this, but individual regeneration lies at the basis of social improvement and society is improving.

If the individual must reform his

fellows by example, so must the nation. It is as impossible for a nation as for an individual to promote good by the doing of evil. Our nation is fortunately situated to be the leader of the peace movement. It has every incentive that any other nation has, and is free from the dangers which many other nations fear. No people have stronger faith than ours in the doctrine that righteousness exalteth a nation, and what nation can more safely put God's truth to the test?

We have had within the last few months a splendid illustration of the milder means that may be employed for the adjustment of such international controversies as were formerly

settled by force. Our government found it necessary to occupy Vera Cruz, not for the purpose of conquest but as a means of protecting American citizens. This gave to the three leading republics of South America an opportunity to propose mediation through their representatives at Washington—a proposition heartily approved by all Latin America. This government promptly accepted the offer, and Ambassador da Gama, of Brazil, Minister Naón, of Argentina, and Minister Suarez, of Chile (both now Ambassadors), with admirable spirit and consummate ability, smoothed out the difficulties and brought about an agreement which

resulted in the retirement of General Huerta from Mexico. The moral influence of this victory for peaceful methods can hardly be over-estimated; it makes a new record in diplomacy; it marks an advance in world politics and commits the entire Western Hemisphere to the policy of mediation. On this side of the Atlantic it will be harder than ever before to inaugurate a war and easier to promote peace. Instead of using the ultimatum, we are adopting the motto: Nothing is final between friends.

The continent-wide war in Europe only serves to bring into brighter light the superiority of the neigh-

bourly way of "reasoning together." War begets war, each conflict sowing the seeds of another war and verifying the Scriptural prophecy: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." The spirit, on the other hand, which leads nations to do justice to each other and to seek conciliation when misunderstandings occur, compels confidence and good will.

Our government has given still further proof of its interest in international peace. In April, 1913, with the approval of the President, I laid before the nations represented at Washington a plan which provides for investigation before the taking up of arms in any case of international

dispute. This government expressed a willingness to treat with each nation separately, without regard to its size or strength, the same terms being offered to all. Thirty-four nations have endorsed the principles embodied in the plan, and thirty

1. Salvador, - - - - August 7, 1913
2. Guatemala, - - - September 20, 1913
3. Panama, - - - - September 20, 1913
4. Honduras, - - - November 3, 1913
5. Nicaragua, - - - December 17, 1913
6. Netherlands, - - - December 18, 1913
7. Bolivia, - - - - January 22, 1914
8. Portugal, - - - - February 4, 1914
9. Persia, - - - - - February 4, 1914
10. Denmark, - - - February 5, 1914
11. Switzerland, - - - February 13, 1914
12. Costa Rica, - - - February 13, 1914
13. Dominican Republic, February 17, 1914
14. Venezuela, - - - March 21, 1914
15. Italy, - - - - - May 5, 1914

16. Norway, - - - - - June 24, 1914
17. Peru, - - - - - July 14, 1914
18. Uruguay, - - - - July 20, 1914
19. Brazil, - - - - - July 24, 1914
20. Argentina, - - - July 24, 1914
21. Chile, - - - - - July 24, 1914
22. Paraguay, - - - August 29, 1914
23. France, - - - - September 15, 1914
24. Great Britain, - - September 15, 1914
25. Spain, - - - - - September 15, 1914
26. China, - - - - - September 15, 1914
27. Russia, - - - - October 1, 1914
28. Equador, - - - - October 13, 1914
29. Greece, - - - - October 13, 1914
30. Sweden, - - - - October 13, 1914

in the order named, have entered into treaties with this end in view. These governments exercise authority over nearly twelve hundred millions,—with our population, fully three-fourths of the inhabitants of the globe.

The treaty with The Netherlands,

which is the form followed by most of the countries, reads as follows:

"The President of the United States of America and Her Majesty the Queen of The Netherlands, being desirous to strengthen the bonds of amity that bind them together and also to advance the cause of general peace, have resolved to enter into a treaty for that purpose, and to that end have appointed as their plenipotentiaries:

"The President of the United States, the Honorable William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State; and

"Her Majesty the Queen of The Netherlands, Chevalier W. L. F. C. van Rappard, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of The Netherlands to the United States;

"Who, after having communicated to each other their respective full powers, found to be in proper form, having agreed upon and concluded the following articles:

"ARTICLE I

"The High Contracting Parties agree that all disputes between them, of every nature

whatsoever, to the settlement of which previous arbitration treaties or agreements do not apply in their terms or are not applied in fact, shall, when diplomatic methods of adjustment have failed, be referred for investigation and report to a permanent International Commission, to be constituted in the manner prescribed in the next succeeding article; and they agree not to declare war or begin hostilities during such investigation and before the report is submitted.

"ARTICLE II

"The International Commission shall be composed of five members, to be appointed as follows: One member shall be chosen from each country, by the Government thereof; one member shall be chosen by each Government from some third country; the fifth member shall be chosen by common agreement between the two Governments, it being understood that he shall not be a citizen of either country. The expenses of the Commission shall be paid by the two Governments in equal proportion.

"The International Commission shall be appointed within six months after the ex-

change of the ratifications of this treaty; and vacancies shall be filled according to the manner of the original appointment.

"ARTICLE III

"In case the High Contracting Parties shall have failed to adjust a dispute by diplomatic methods, they shall at once refer it to the International Commission for investigation and report. The International Commission may, however, spontaneously offer its services to that effect, and in such case it shall notify both Governments and request their coöperation in the investigation.

"The High Contracting Parties agree to furnish the Permanent International Commission with all the means and facilities required for its investigation and report.

"The report of the International Commission shall be completed within one year after the date on which it shall declare its investigation to have begun, unless the High Contracting Parties shall limit or extend the time by mutual agreement. The report shall be prepared in triplicate; one copy shall be presented to each Government, and the third retained by the Commission for its files.

"The High Contracting Parties reserve the right to act independently on the subject-matter of the dispute after the report of the Commission shall have been submitted.

"ARTICLE IV

"The present treaty shall be ratified by the President of the United States of America, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate thereof; and by Her Majesty the Queen of The Netherlands; and the ratifications shall be exchanged as soon as possible. It shall take effect immediately after the exchange of ratifications, and shall continue in force for a period of five years; and it shall thereafter remain in force until twelve months after one of the High Contracting Parties have given notice to the other of an intention to terminate it.

"In witness whereof, the respective plenipotentiaries have signed the present treaty and have affixed thereunto their seals.

"Done in Washington on the eighteenth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and thirteen."

There are five fundamental propositions which run through all the

treaties, namely, (1) that investigation shall be resorted to in *all* cases not otherwise provided for; (2) the Commission is *permanent* and ready to be invoked at any time; (3) the investigation to be concluded within *one year* unless the time is changed by mutual consent; (4) the parties agree *not to declare war or begin hostilities* until the investigation has been made; but (5) *they reserve the right to act independently* after the investigation is completed.

It is believed that these treaties will go far towards making war a remote possibility, for it will be difficult for two nations to engage in war after a year's deliberation. Diplo-

macy is the art of keeping cool, and the period provided for investigation not only permits the subsidence of passion and the restoration of reason, but it gives time for the operation of that public opinion, which more and more condemns the use of force and exalts the processes of reason. Time also enables impartial judges to separate questions of fact from questions of honour—a most important task, since the line between the two is quite sure to be obscured when anger and prejudice are aroused.

If this plan realizes the hopes of those who support it and is employed between other nations, a tremendous impulse will have been given to the

movement that has for its end the establishment of universal peace.

I am convinced that the American people are heartily in accord with the effort to justify our nation's claim to primacy in all that tends to substitute reason for force in the settlement of international disputes. If I were asked to picture our nation's future, I would not change the language which I employed fourteen years ago in describing the ideal republic :

"I can conceive of a national destiny surpassing the glories of the present and the past—a destiny which meets the responsibilities of to-day and measures up to the possibilities of the future. Behold a republic,

resting securely upon the foundation stones quarried by revolutionary patriots from the mountain of eternal truth—a republic applying in practice and proclaiming to the world the self-evident propositions that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights; that governments are instituted among men to secure these rights, and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. Behold a republic in which civil and religious liberty stimulate all to earnest endeavour and in which the law restrains every hand uplifted for a neighbour's injury—a republic in which every citizen is a

sovereign, but in which no one cares or dares to wear a crown.

"Behold a republic standing erect while empires all around are bowed beneath the weight of their own armaments—a republic whose flag is loved while other flags are only feared. Behold a republic increasing in population, in wealth, in strength and in influence, solving the problems of civilization and hastening the coming of a universal brotherhood—a republic which shakes thrones and dissolves aristocracies by its silent example and gives light and inspiration to those who sit in darkness. Behold a republic gradually but surely becoming the supreme moral

factor in the world's progress and the accepted arbiter of the world's disputes—a republic whose history, like the path of the just, 'is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'"

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